



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The world has seen many a dangerous disease like Ebola, Swine Flu, and Plague which have catastrophic impact on demography, economy, education and cultures of different society. Likewise COVID-19 also has so much of disastrous impact on various sectors all over the world. This pandemic infectious disease was caused by SARS- COV-2 which first came to light in Wuhan in December 2019. As the positive cases of COVID-19 spread in bombarding number throughout the world WHO declared it as a pandemic. Almost all the countries of world have been put into lockdown. It has affected the lives in all sectors of our society. It has brought global recession in economy because of the lockdown. Education sector is also badly affected facing the disastrous impact of COVID-19. There is closure of educational institution through - out the world. To deal with teaching learning process the focus is drawn to online learning platform. But due to lack of resource and technically expertise people many underdeveloped and developing countries are facing problems in conducting online classes. In this time period, India is also focusing on online learning but there is a lot of disparity in accessibility to education through online platform because there are network issue, accessibility to internet, personal computer and other devices in India. Some students have accessibility to online learning platform and some are not which create new kind of digital inequality in accessing education leading to barrier in smoother teaching-learning process. This paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education in India, where the impact of COVID-19 has been the highlight of the major issues and transition from traditional system of education i.e. face to face classroom learning and teaching to focus on online learning. It seeks to create a forum that can be referred to by the all stakeholder in education sector to give wings to young India.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Higher education, Pandemic, Online teaching, digital inequality.

INTRODUCTION:

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by SARS-COV-2, a newly discovered virus. Most of people infected with the COVID-19 virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and they recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those who have medical problems like cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Primarily, the COVID-19 virus spreads through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (WHO). The virus came to light in Wuhan in December 2019; there is confusion whether the virus was originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) or from its nearby Wuhan Seafood Market. It has killed 2,87,354 people across the globe and infected 4,256,579 (as on May 12, 2020). The virus has spread to 212 countries. In India, 70,827 confirmed cases and 2,294 deaths have been reported, according to the official report of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW). To control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the Prime Minister of India announced nationwide lockdown.

185 countries have shut down their educational institutions to fight against COVID-19 disease. UNESCO estimates that currently over 89% students are out of schools, out of total population of students enrolled in education globally. Schools, colleges and university are closed and there is no certainty when they will reopen. This is a crucial time for the education system because various examinations such as Board examinations, semester examination, admissions, entrance tests, competitive examinations of various universities are conducted in this period. As the days pass by with no immediate solution to stop the outbreak of Covid-19, school and university closures will not only have a long-term impact on the continuity of teaching and learning for more than 285 million young learners in India but also negative economic and societal consequences. The higher education system is significantly affected by the pandemic, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future.

INSTITUTION:

Higher educational institutions immediately were shut down when the first 21 day lockdown was announced by the prime minister of India on 24th March 2020. In second phase lockdown started from 15th April, here only 'A' class officers are allowed for their work in various colleges and universities. Research scholars are also not allowed to work in university campus. If someone wants to enter the campus they have to take prior permission from the administration of educational institutions. In such situation the teaching learning process has been stopped and almost all the research scholars are facing problem because they do not use laboratories and libraries. However online classes have been started but the online classes have deprived many under- privileged learners because of the facts that they don't have laptop, Smartphone, internet connectivity except the educational opportunities only in the institution.

TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS:

Due to shut down of the educational institution students are far away from their

learning and other academic activities. UGC and MHRD have issued guideline for taking online teaching- learning processes by Google classroom, Google Hangout, Cisco Webex meeting, OERs, SWAYAM, SWAYAMPRAVA. But India is a developing country with world's second largest population where many students belong to poor rural family who do not have access to quality education and they learn in offline classes. Many universities of India conduct their teaching-learning process in face to face mode. They have lack IT infrastructure for effective delivery of education through e-learning mode. Only private institution could adopt online teaching methods. Comparing face-to-face learning with online learning brings significant deficiencies in the online mode like lack of human connect; absence of opportunities of collaborative learning and teacher supervision and the most important deficiency is lack of opportunities for hands on learning in complex subjects like Mathematics and Science. Only 24% households of India have internet facility. Over 15% of rural population and 42% of urban population have access to internet services, while only 8% of all households with members aged between 5 to 24 have a computer and internet connection according to the National Sample Survey Report on Education 2017-18. In 2019, Internet and Mobile Association of India reports 67% of men and 33% of women have access to internet and in rural area 72% of men and 28% of women have access to internet. It prominently shows the gender disparity in internet access. So there is also a big challenge of online learning and also equal educational opportunity of male and female students through online mode.

STUDENT:

As per Guidelines of UGC and MHRD some universities and colleges are providing online teaching to their students but mainly rural areas and those poor students who have no accessibility to internet, personal computer or smart phone for attaining the online classes are affected adversely by the pandemic. Poor meritorious students are suffering badly through the technical discrimination, because they do not have technical tools and expertise of internet and usages of digital devices. It creates a new kind of inequality in higher education in accessing the educational opportunities. Students with disabilities are also badly affected by the class room shut down. They are provided less with help and inadequately trained teachers. Many of teachers have lack of ICT skills and knowledge. They are unprepared to teach in online mode and cannot ensure student engagement in the virtual classroom, especially students with disabilities. Equipment, internet access and specially designed materials and support make learning costly for students and their family. There is Gender disparities in education in India, where getting education is already a struggle due to poverty, economic vulnerability and crisis. If there will be poverty, economic vulnerability due to nationwide lock down then many of girl students may not join the educational institution. Dropout rate will increase due to poverty, economic vulnerability and crisis. It was happened in Africa after the Ebola Crisis of 2014. A large number of Indian students enrolled in abroad universities like China, UK, USA, Italy and other different countries are badly affected by the pandemic and it is predicted that the demand of international higher education will decrease.

TEACHER:

All the educational institutions have been closed unexpectedly and for unknown durations and in such situation teachers are unsure about their responsibilities and struggling in maintaining connections with students to support their learning. Some teachers may feel confused and stressful in this new transitional time of teaching while dealing with online classes. In India, many teachers are not trained and not sound in ICT skills and knowledge to take online classes. It is very new to them and therefore, they are facing a lots technical problem while taking classes through online mode. They are unprepared to take online classes and they cannot ensure student engagement in the virtual classroom. Although it is not right time to give training to the teachers, it is the time to take maximum output from them. To deal with such unpredicted situation the teachers must be trained.

EXAMINATION:

The month from April to June is very crucial for Indian education system because in this time assessment, entrance examinations are conducted but due to nationwide lockdown there is no certainty when colleges and universities reopen. Some colleges and universities had the scheduled mid-semester and semester examination in the month of April and May but they have postponed the schedule of examination. MHRD and UGC have issued guideline for examination of higher education. According to guideline of UGC and MHRD examination will be held from 1st July 2020 to 15th July 2020 for terminal semester and intermediate semester will be held from 16th July 2020 to 31st July 2020 and result of terminal semester will be declared on 31st July 2020 and intermediate semester result will come on 14th August 2020. Strategies to postpone, skip or administer examination after a long time raise major concerns about fairness, especially when assess to learning becomes only a variable. Postponing examination will disrupt the next academic year of education leading lacking the quality of education as there will be limited time to complete the course content and other academic activities. Many agencies which conduct entrance examination in higher education have extended form fill up date and postpone the examinations till further notification.

ADMISSION PROCESS:

In the time of pandemic the Report of UGC suggested to conduct a common admission test at National / State level for admission to the PG, UG courses and Research Programmes in the universities and colleges (Report of the UGC Committee). Admission process will be held on 1st August 2020 to 31st August 2020 and classes will start on 1st September 2020 of fresh batch and 2nd year and 3rd year classes will start on 1st August 2020. It will be a big challenge for colleges and universities to complete their syllabus on time without compromising on the quality of education. The universities may conduct viva voce examination for M. Phil and Ph. D. through video conferencing using Google, Skype and Microsoft technology. In India most of the students and institutions prefer the offline process of admissions

because they do not have access to high speed Wifi, IT infrastructure and many of them belong to villages, small cities or town internet connectivity is major challenge. Over 1.44 crore students are appearing their school leaving exams and over 50 lakh students will look to enroll in a higher education institution in this academic session in India. It will be also a big challenge for colleges and universities to complete their admission process without any failure. If higher education system will not take necessary step regarding admission process, enrolment rate in higher classes will decrease.

CONCLUSION:

The COVID-19 has disastrous impact on economy, demography, international relation, culture and trade as well as education. It creates a kind of disparity in accessing educational opportunities as teaching and learning process are done in online platforms and there is so much of disparity in accessing internet because of remote and rural areas as well as due to poor economic condition of people in India. Therefore, various problems of our education system should be solved, the disparity must be minimized and different measures and initiatives must be taken for shifting normal classroom learning to online learning which will help in combating such unprecedented situation in future.

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